DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 388 104 FL 023 378

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TITLE Talking about AIDS in Hong Kong: Cultural Models in Public Health Discourse.
PUB DATE Apr 95
NOTE 47p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Language Centre Seminar (30th, Singapore, April 17-19, 1995).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome; Behavior Standards; *Chinese; Communication Problems; Comparative Analysis; *Cultural Context; Cultural Pluralism; Cultural Traits; Culture Conflict; Discourse Analysis; Disease Control; *English (Second Language); English for Special Purposes; Foreign Countries; Health Promotion; Intercultural Communication; Language Research; *Language Role; Language Usage; Persuasive Discourse; *Public Health; Sociocultural Patterns; Student Attitudes; Television
IDENTIFIERS *Hong Kong; Public Service Campaigns

ABSTRACT

A study explored the issues of cultural identity and interaction in public health discourse concerning Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in Hong Kong's multilingual, multicultural social context. Twenty public service announcements (PSAs) concerning AIDS awareness televised in both English and Cantonese in Hong Kong from 1987 to 1994 were analyzed for the ways in which they construct norms of behavior for various groups represented in the ads and thereby prescribe norms of interpretation for viewers, norms that vary subtly between English and Cantonese versions. The study then expands on this analysis through analysis of the responses of local Cantonese-speaking college students to the PSAs. This was accomplished in an English for Professional Communication class activity simulating media focus groups whose task was to evaluate government-produced PSAs and suggest a campaign of their own. Excerpts of transcripts of the student interactions are included. Implications for classroom communication are discussed. Contains 45 references. (MSE)

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ED 388 104

Talking about AIDS in Hong Kong: Cultural Models in Public Health Discourse

A Paper Presented at the SEAMEO Regional Language Centre Seminar
Singapore, April 17-19, 1995

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ABSTRACT

Different speech communities adopt different ways of talking and rules of interaction surrounding particular topics in communication. These differences are especially evident when topics are 'emotionally charged', such as those involving sexuality, attitudes towards death and disease and religious or moral conventions. In situations where the discussion of such topics involves participants from different speech communities (like the communicative language classroom), chances for miscommunication increase, not just because of cultural differences in attitudes and values but also because of variations in the norms for the use of language associated with the topic. Public discourse plays an important role in both reflecting and reinforcing norms of language use by putting forth models of discourse which assign to individuals or groups within the community certain identities and roles.

This paper explores issues of identity and interaction in the discourse of public health in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual context through a 'frame analysis' of 20 AIDS awareness API's aired in both English and Cantonese in Hong Kong from 1987 to 1994. Using a methodology derived from the work of Goffman (1974), and Gee (1990), it examines how the authors of AIDS awareness messages in Hong Kong project cultural models on several different levels of 'framing' and how these models both reflect and validate dominant ideologies within the society.

Implications for classroom communication are explored through the description of a simulation activity using the API's to stimulate small group discussion with a class of local first year tertiary students enrolled in a course in English for Professional Communication.

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1. Introduction

The more language teaching researchers and practitioners emphasize 'real-world' language use, the more we find our classrooms being 'invaded' by real world issues. When classroom discourse turns towards topics outside the traditional province of language teaching, as it inevitably does in any communicative classroom, teachers can find themselves in ambiguous or awkward situations, particularly when the topics in question involve areas that are controversial, emotionally charged or politically sensitive. Cindy Patton tells of one such experience in an L1 writing lesson:

> In the course of a freewriting exercise in my freshman composition course, students were asked to reflect on their choice of the University of Massachusetts. One woman said she had taken her second choice over her preference to attend a Florida university because she was afraid that if she went to Miami she would get AIDS. I couldn't simply send this student off to health services or to a course in the biology department. I could not even change her views of a few basic AIDS facts because as a writing teacher my presentation of 'facts' does not bear the authority of a scientist's. What I could do was teach her to question her own thought process, to be sensitive to sources and to power relations among authorities, and to reflect how the information she had incorporated into her belief system affected her life choices. I could, as a cultural critic and teacher of the art of reading well, help her to understand how mass media texts, from 'AIDS prevention' pamphlets to newspaper articles, construct her experience of HIV and AIDS and how her belief system affects her decisions about sex and drug use practices (Patton 1990:107).

Situations like this are even more problematic in the second or foreign language classroom where teachers and learners may be approaching topics with different sets of culturally constructed expectations and presuppositions, not only about 'the facts' of the topic, but also about how (or whether) it is proper to discuss the topic in a particular setting. The solution suggested by Patton--that of encouraging students to examine their belief systems and where they came from--may be more difficult to implement for a teacher teaching in a culture which is not her own, and dealing with learners whose repertoire of culturally constructed frames she may not be totally familiar with. It is this very difficulty, however, that makes such moments so

crucial in language learning, for what we teach when we teach language is not simply the encoding and decoding a various bits of information, but also how speakers of the language fit information into particular social frameworks. Being able to speak appropriately about sex, for example, or politics, requires far more than knowledge of the vocabulary of biological organs or the organs of government. It also requires some understanding of the frames of reference members of a particular community will bring to such topics. Gee (1990) refers to such frames of reference as *cultural models* and points out the deep implications of such models for language education. Cultural models, he argues, 'are the *basis* on which choices about exclusions and inclusions and assumptions of context are made; every word in the language is tied to a myriad of interconnecting cultural models' (1990:90).

This paper aims to explore the issue of cultural models or 'frames' and how they can affect intercultural communication in general, and classroom communication in particular. It focuses on the issue of HIV and AIDS because this is an area rich in signification in all cultures, bringing together notions of disease, death, power, gender, sexuality and social class in ways that may make differences in culturally constructed frames particularly salient. In examining how such frames operate, I begin with the assumption implicit in Patton's strategy for dealing with her 'misinformed' student: that the way we approach the world is socially constructed, and, in technological societies, mass media plays a major role in this construction.

1.1 Background

So far, the impact of HIV and HIV related illness has been relatively small in Hong Kong when compared with the situations in North America, Europe and Africa. Since the first reported case of AIDS in Hong Kong surfaced in February of 1985,

520 cases of HIV sero-positivity have been registered with the Department of Health, with 130 of those cases having progressed to AIDS (AIDS Unit 1994b). As of February 28, 1995, 75 people in the territory had died of HIV related illness. Most cases of HIV sero-positivity in Hong Kong are thought to have been infected through sexual routes with the number of those thought to have been infected through heterosexual contact roughly equal to those reporting homosexual contact (AIDS Unit 1994a). The strategy of the government in dealing with the issue has been to implement an AIDS prevention, care and control programme which has included the establishment of a counselling based clinic for HIV testing and treatment, the formation of various government bodies (a special AIDS Unit in the Department of Health, the AIDS Foundation, the central Advisory Council on AIDS), and the launching of a publicity programme by the Committee on Education and Publicity on AIDS (CEPAIDS) (through the offices of the Government Information Services). Along with billboards, pamphlets, comic books and radio announcements, CEPAIDS has produced 20 AIDS awareness television 'Announcements in the Public Interest' (API's) since 1987, which have been aired extensively on both English and Cantonese channels.

Research into the main sources of information about AIDS among the local population suggests that these API's have played an important role in people's knowledge of AIDS, the transmission of HIV, and how to prevent it. A 1992 study commissioned by the AIDS Foundation (Hong Kong AIDS Foundation 1993) found that 92% of subjects reported television as a major source of information about AIDS, with 71% citing it as their main source of information. Similarly, in another study focusing only on secondary school students (Betson 1993), 77% cited the mass

media as their main source of information about AIDS. There are indications, however, that the government's publicity campaign has not been as effective in eliciting behaviour change or increasing levels of knowledge as one would hope. For example, despite the emphasis in the government API's on avoiding 'casual' sex, more than a quarter of the students questioned in the Betson study were uncertain as to whether they would practice 'casual sex', one in ten indicated that they would not use condoms, even if they changed their sexual partners frequently, and only about half knew that other contraceptive choices (IUD, diaphragm, vasectomy and tubal ligation) could not prevent HIV infection. Furthermore, the Foundation study revealed a high level of confusion regarding the routes of transmission of HIV, with 41'% thinking HIV could be transmitted through coughs and sneezes and as many as 77% of the respondents believing the virus to be transmitted through mosquito bites. The study also showed a low degree of tolerance of people living with HIV/AIDS in the society, with almost 3/4 of the respondents indicating that they would 'avoid' or 'totally avoid' daily social contact with those infected. Criticism of CEPAIDS's AIDS awareness campaign has even surfaced within the government itself. In 1993, Legislative Councillor Dr. Leong Che-hung accused the government produced television announcements of 'building up fear and doubt about the disease among the public' rather than fostering education, understanding or sympathy for people with HIV/AIDS (Leong 1993).

The relative effectiveness of the government's API's in disseminating information or effecting behaviour change is, however, incidental to this study. What I am really interested in is not the degree of knowledge the ads give people about AIDS, but how they teach people to think about AIDS, and to talk about it, how they

operate to reinforce and validate existing cultural models as well as to construct new cultural models associated with this particular topic. This process is especially interesting in Hong Kong with its large expatriate community living side by side with its local Chinese population, a situation necessitating the government to take a bilingual and bicultural approach to public health education, to, as it were, operate within two different cultural models simultaneously.

My examination of the issue is divided into two parts: the first, an analysis of the 20 API's on AIDS awareness produced by the government using Goffman's (1974) concept of 'frames' in which I attempt to demonstrate how the messages construct norms of behaviour for various groups represented in the ads and thereby prescribe norms of interpretation for viewers, norms that vary subtly between English and Cantonese versions. The second part of the study expands on the frame analysis in the first part by observing the responses of a class of local Cantonese speaking tertiary students in an activity where they simulated media focus groups whose task was to evaluate the government produced API's and suggest a campaign of their own.

1.2 Frames, Scripts, Schema and Cultural Models

Various researchers in fields as diverse as language teaching, linguistics, sociology and artificial intelligence have made use of the concept of 'frames' in analysing human behaviour, interaction and communication. Alternatively referred to as 'scripts' (Shank & Ableson 1977), 'schema' (Rumelhart 1975), 'structures of expectations' (Ross 1975) and 'cultural models' (Gee 1990), the notion of 'framing' is grounded in the idea that people organize information and knowledge about new events, objects or situations on the basis of their experience in a given culture. This experience leads them to build up certain structures of expectation through which

they interpret and judge the world.

Tannen (1990) points out that the concept of 'frames' has been used in two different senses. First, it has been seen as the set of expectations we bring to situations, what might also be called 'schema'. The second sense, more closely associated with the work of Goffman (1974), sees 'frames' as the 'alignments' people bring to each other in human interaction. This paper uses the term in both senses, since it seems to me that both views of framing are so closely inter-related that it is often neither easy nor desirable to separate them; the 'alignments' we bring to our interaction, and the various rules that operate as part of these alignments, are determined by our culturally constructed expectations of the kinds of roles and behaviours appropriate to particular contexts.

When the information we receive in situations conforms to our internal frames, and when interaction proceeds according to the norms prescribed by the 'alignments' we bring to it, processing takes place more or less automatically. When, however, actions or events occur which are 'not in the script', or when people's behaviour does not accord with the alignment of the interaction, we must reassess the situation and take action to resolve the conflict between what we think should be happening and what is actually happening. Such action rarely involves revising our original frames, which are amazingly durable. Rather, we tend to search for reasons why the situation is not as it 'should' be. If a language teacher begins a lesson by playing the saxophone, for example, students are less likely to revise their conception of what is appropriate behaviour in a language lesson to include the playing of musical instruments; they are more likely to question the teacher's competence, credentials or even her sanity. Most 'out of frame' activity, of course, is not so extreme, involving

misunderstandings, momentary lapses of control, accidents, or unplanned interruptions. Some 'out of frame' activities are even scripted into the original frame, such as a character's asides to the audience during a play. On the level of interaction, 'out of frame' activity may signal a change of alignment, or what Goffman (1981) calls 'footing'. Again, how changes in footing are executed marked and accepted or rejected by participants depends very much on the participants' expectations of what is proper in a particular situation. If participants believes that they are unreasonably being led onto 'unfamiliar ground', they are less likely to follow, and more likely to question the motivations of the person with whom they are speaking.

Framing, therefore, is closely tied to notions of identity and the attitudes we have towards individuals and groups. We interpret and judge people and their actions according to how well they 'fit' into the frames we bring to situations. Those who fit well most or all of the time we call 'us'; those who don't fit, we call 'them'. In this sense, frames are also boundaries; they allow some participants to operate within the interaction, as long as they play by the rules, while others are excluded from the interaction, quite literally 'out of the picture'. The walls of a classroom, for example, act as one kind of frame, excluding from it at certain times participants who are not either teachers or learners. The lesson acts as another frame within the frame of the classroom in which participants are further limited to the kinds of behaviour that is acceptable according to various participant roles. If the school janitor were to violate these frames, that is, enter the classroom during a lesson to clean the floor, he would probably be censured by the teacher and the school authorities. Similarly, a pupil who violated the frame of the lesson by continually interrupting the teacher, or violated the frame of the classroom by escaping into the corridor at inappropriate times,

would also receive censure. More importantly, when such 'breaking of frame' becomes chronic, violators risk being taken out of the frame altogether; the janitor who persistently interrupts lessons may find himself out of a job, and the uncontrollable pupil may find himself removed from the frame of the classroom and placed in the frame of the principal's office or the office of the school psychologist.

This relationship between framing and social identity is of primary importance in examining the discourse of AIDS. The way language is used to define boundaries between self and 'others', whether these other's are people living with HIV/AIDS, people who belong to groups perceived to be at 'high risk' for AIDS, or people from countries or regions with high rates of HIV sero-positivity, will determine how participants within the discourse will view AIDS, 'others', and their own risk of infection. Public health messages, like the API's produced by the Hong Kong government, do much more than disseminate information. They create frames for understanding the issue and position participants within those frames. Just as texts 'construct' ideal readers (Kress 1985), public health announcements construct ideal viewers and present them with a range of options on how to regard themselves in relation to the people and situations represented in the announcements.

1.3 Frames and the Analysis of Television Commercials

Television commercials provide a particularly rich area for the analysis of frames and cultural models for several reasons. First, since advertisements are typically designed to fit the presumed attitudes and values of the target audience (Vestergaard & Schroder 1985), they are often accurate reflections of the prevalent frames at work within a society. Whether they are actually effective or not, they at least presume to teach us who we are and who we should want to be by holding up

prototypes of idealized group identity as well as reminders of the consequences of exclusion from the group. Second, because of the time constraints of a thirty second commercial, authors of the message must pay special attention to the cues and markers that signal to the viewer the frame and footing she is meant to bring to it. Therefore, such signals tend to be far more salient than they might be in longer messages. Finally, television commercials do not just reflect frames and cultural models, they also help to create them. The frames through which we view reality come from our experience with the world, and in modern technological societies our experience with the 'world' increasingly means our experience with electronic media. Meyrowitz, commenting on the power of the media to construct and enforce participant frames, writes:

> Media, like physical places, include and exclude participants. Media, like walls and windows, can hide and they can reveal. Media can create a sense of sharing and belonging, or a feeling of exclusion and isolation. Media can reinforce a them vs. us feeling or they can undermine it. (1985:7)

Commercials have a special status among media messages. Since they are seldom viewed just once, but played out over and over again, they become like rituals that gradually build into the scripts we bring to our social situations.

Just as the frame of an English lesson exists within the frame of a classroom which exists within the frame of an institution, which further exists within the frame of a particular society with its particular ideas and expectations about education, so too do media messages exist simultaneously within several different related and inter-nested frames, whose boundaries are sometimes physical, sometimes temporal and sometimes determined by generic or cultural conventions or expectations (Fig. 1). The

<insert Fig. 1>

way each of these frames is constructed and the extent to which what occurs within them is seen as 'in frame' or 'out of frame' helps determine how viewers interpret what is going on in the message and how it relates to them. Furthermore, what occurs within each of these frames affects and is affected by what happens in all of the others. In analysing the AIDS awareness television campaign of the Hong Kong government, I will first examine the dynamics of each of these inter-nested frames separately and then go on to explore how they work together in the outermost frame to construct viewers' ways of seeing and being in relation to the topic.

The innermost frame, what I call the *physical frame*, is bounded by the screen of the television set. Like the border of a photograph, the television screen provides a space within which figures are situated according to certain conventions of the medium. The way these conventions are manipulated will affect how viewers regard the people or objects shown. For example, a scene shot in bright lighting with steady camera will create one kind of impression, while a similar scene shot in uneven lighting with an unsteady, hand-held camera will create a totally different impression. Similarly, a person represented by a full facial shot looking directly at the camera projects one kind of identity, whereas the same figure, represented by shots of only her hands, legs or torso, or whose face is obscured through the use of electronic distortion will project a very different kind of identity. The relationship between the *visual channel* and the *audio channel* can also affect how a viewer will interpret a scene: do the people in the scene speak directly to the viewer, or only to other people in the scene, or is the whole scene further distanced from the viewer through the 'laminating' device of a voiceover (Goffman 1974)?

The *generic frame* is the space within which the commercial exists as a

commercial. It is bounded temporally by the split second of white space which occurs before and after it, and is also constrained by viewers' expectations of what a commercial should be and do. These expectations involve fulfilling certain generic conventions typical of television commercials regarding such issues as length (usually 30 seconds), rhetorical structure (usually problem-solution structure) and purpose (to get the viewer to take some kind of action). When commercials fail to fulfil expectations, they can alter viewers' perceptions of the framers of the message or the product represented, sometimes negatively, and sometimes positively. Public health messages hold an ambiguous position within this frame since they usually have no product to offer, often seek to discourage behaviour rather than encourage it, and sometimes, most conspicuously in the case of AIDS awareness messages, aim to discourage behaviour (sexual activity) likely to be encouraged by other commercials broadcast within the same period of television viewing (Price 1989).

The next frame, *the representational frame,* is especially important in commercials which present a dramatization of some kind of 'real life' situation. It includes the set of cultural expectations viewers bring to the people and situations represented on the screen, and how these expectations are activated through a kind of 'shorthand' consisting of various cues or signals (dress, setting, facial expressions, gestures, etc.).

The outermost frame, *the social frame*, refers to how viewers bring the message of the ads to their social interactions. In the case of AIDS awareness, there is a wide range of relevant situations in which this frame might be applied which may include such diverse contexts as casual conversation among friends about the topic, negotiation of a sexual encounter, confrontation with authorities regarding

institutional or public policy on AIDS, or, as in this study, a classroom discussion.

2. Analysis: Discourse as Cordon Sanitaire

Recently scholars have paid considerable attention to the language of HIV and AIDS in the media and in public health messages. Most of this work has concentrated on the use of rhetorical devices in constructing and organizing AIDS discourse. Metaphor, for example, has been widely studied, with researchers pointing out how AIDS has been linked to images of war, poverty, deviance, personified death, criminality/punishment and plague (Alcorn 1987, Ross 1989, Sontag 1989). Others, taking a *social constructionist* approach, have attempted to trace the ideological models through which AIDS is viewed and how it has been constructed to validate and strengthen existing divisions within society (Patton 1990, Watney 1989). Historians have situated the discourse of AIDS within patterns of response to past epidemics, revealing tendencies in all time periods to associate diseases, especially sexually transmitted diseases, with foreign invasion, moral failing and a breakdown in social order (Fee & Fox 1988). Media critics have examined how AIDS news coverage and education tends to be couched in the form of melodramatic morality tales with inevitably tragic endings in which AIDS is rhetorically framed as enigmatic, violent, plague-like and caused by deviance, and people affected by it take on the opposing roles of *innocent victims* and *guilty agents* (Goldstein 1991, Lupton 1994, Treicher 1993). Finally, educationalist have shown how public health messages about AIDS often present vague or contradictory ideas which emphasize cultural notions of duty, virtue and morality at the expense of providing practical information (Baggaley 1993, Bolton 1992). Nearly all of these observations, based on public discourse in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, also hold true for Hong Kong;

educational materials produced by the government consistently represent AIDS as a mysterious 'killer disease', stalking the Territory vampire-like, searching for it's next 'victim'. Characters in AIDS awareness API's are alternatively portrayed as wilful and dangerous 'AIDS carriers' or innocent bystanders, and HIV infection is represented as a social rather than a medical problem, the consequence of immoral or deviant behaviour. Not one of the government's television spots gives clear information on the actual mechanics of HIV transmission (or, for that matter, even bothers to distinguish between HIV and AIDS) and condom use is only mentioned in six of the twenty ads, most of them instead cautioning against the vague, undefined practice of 'casual sex' and implying that those infected with HIV somehow deserve their fate because of a failure to take responsibility for their own safety, the safety of their family members and the safety of society as a whole.

This paper, however, concerns itself less with the blunt instruments of moralistic and metaphorical language and more with the frames within which these rhetorical devices operate and how the subtle manipulation of these frames can affect our perception of and attitudes towards the people, objects and concepts presented. The notion of 'frames' and boundaries is, in fact, of primary importance in the study of social responses to disease. Society's first response to outbreaks of disease has typically been the drawing of boundaries between the sick and the well, boundaries that often mirror and reinforce those present in existing cultural models. Quarantine, as Musto (1988:77) points out, is often 'a response not only to the actual mode of transmission, but also to a popular demand to establish a boundary between the *kind of person* so diseased and the *respectable people* who hope to remain healthy.' Such 'rituals of exclusion', as Foucault (1978:98) calls them, need not be physical, but may

operate through the patterns of division and segmentation at work within the prevalent discourse of a society. Anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966:113) takes this idea one step further, suggesting that societies define illness and pollution based on existing boundaries of social order; the 'polluting person' is one who has violated these boundaries, who has 'crossed some line which should not have been crossed.'

Several of the researchers mentioned above have applied the idea of symbolic or metaphorical quarantine to the discourse of AIDS. Lupton (1994:135), for example, in her analysis of the language of invasion in popular and medical writing about AIDS, notes that figures of speech can act to 'construct a *cordon sanitaire* between the contaminated and those at risk of contamination.' Patton (1990:99) uses the same phrase, claiming that 'the categories of science, especially the conjuncture of epidemiology and virology, have placed a barely invisible *cordon sanitaire* around minority communities, "deviant" individuals, and around the entire continent of Africa.' These writers use the term *cordon sanitaire* as a metaphor for the way language creates and reflects divisions between people. 'Frame analysis', however, takes a slightly different approach, suggesting that language need not 'create' a *cordon sanitaire*, but that such boundaries already exist implicit in the 'frames' that operate in all communication, and, that rather than mere symbolic boundaries, these frames constitute practical borders of inclusion and exclusion in discourse. What isolates individuals and groups in AIDS discourse is not just the way they are rhetorically labelled, but also where they are placed in relation to these borders.

The AIDS awareness campaign of the Hong Kong government provides a good example of how media messages about AIDS use framing to influence how viewers understand the identity and status of certain individuals and social groups. Despite

the avowed intention of the government to alert the 'general public' to the dangers of HIV infection and its relevance to them, the ads actually serve to distance viewers from the problem by presenting AIDS and people associated with it as 'out of frame' on the physical, generic and representational levels of the discourse. The effect of this 'out-of-frame' positioning is that it robs the issue of practical relevance and denies figures affected by it the 'rights' and status afforded to 'in-frame' participants. On the physical level, they cease being subjects of photographic representation and become objects for study and surveillance. On the generic level, they are denied the chance of redemption typically afforded to characters in commercials. And on the representational level, they are prohibited from participating in normal discourse altogether, becoming instead topics of other people's discourse. Furthermore, such 'out-of-frame' status is portrayed in the ads not just as the consequence but as the cause of HIV infection. The underlying message of the AIDS awareness campaign in Hong Kong is that AIDS is the result of violating cultural models and acceptable forms of alignment in human interaction, that the way to prevent it is to conform to the established norms, and that the government's role in 'educating' people about AIDS is to remind the public of the boundaries society sets for normal behaviour and interaction and of the penalties reserved for those who 'break frame'.

This model is certainly not unique to Hong Kong, but doubtless characterizes AIDS discourse in most if not all countries. The way frames are drawn, however, will vary in different contexts, whether they be different cultures or different groups within the same culture. The 'Guide to Safer Sex' produced by the Hong Kong Ten Percent Club, an advocacy group for gay rights, for example, presents participant identity and status in a very different way than the government produced API's because it

approaches the issue through different frames of what is expected and acceptable in education, communication and human relationships. The value of using frame analysis to examine AIDS education messages is that comparative studies across cultures or across groups within a culture can not only shed light on the different ways people talk about AIDS and the potential for mis-communication or misunderstanding, but can also illuminate how different communities construct frames around potentially 'disruptive' issues--how and where they 'draw the line', when it comes to speaking of topics like sex, drug use, and death.

2.1 The Physical Frame

'Out-of-frame' status in the Hong Kong government's commercials on AIDS is perhaps most noticeable on the physical level, where figures are presented as literally not fitting into the frame of the television screen. In more than half of the ads, characters associated with AIDS are shot out of frame. Sometimes the camera reduces the figures to a collection of 'detached' body parts, as in *Girls*, in which the individual perceived at risk for HIV infection is presented in succession of shots of her feet, legs, crotch, arms and hands, her face not becoming visible until the end of the ad, or *Mouth* which features a series of eleven disembodied mouths. The effect of this technique is to rob the figures of their identity, turning them into mere specimens. In other ads (*Homosexuals, Sharing Needle*) the off-centre and out-of-frame positioning of figures, and our inability to clearly distinguish their faces, gives the impression that what we are seeing is being filmed surreptitiously, imbuing the scenes with an air of criminality. Kalin (1993) observes a similar technique used in a U.S. news programme's portrayal of 'high risk groups':

> Shot from the rear, hands in each other's pockets, two mustached "clone style" white men walk away from the viewer, accompanying the words "Homosexual Males."

> Shot from above in a rough wooden sail boat approximately twenty Haitian men and women stand packed together; we cannot decipher a single face as we hear the word "Haitians." Shot in extreme close-up, a thumb and forefinger hold a bottle cap of clear liquid (presumably heroin) while another thumb and forefinger hold a match beneath it: we hear "Drug Abusers." The position of these bodies in relation to the viewer determines our inability to recognize them as people, to assign them identities. ABC quickly establishes a grotesque hierarchy of identification for the viewer, dictated by comparative levels of perceived "exoticism" or otherness... (Kalin 1993:129)

Usually a figure's status as either 'AIDS carrier' or 'AIDS victim' is signalled by their position in relation to the camera, 'victims' pictured in frontal shots, looking directly at the camera, 'carriers' with their faces hidden or 'cut off', or with their backs to the camera, or entering the frame from the side, literally invading the picture. Sometimes the 'carrier' figure is shown physically drawing the 'victim' figure out of the frame, as in *Bar*, in which the young male victim clothed in a football jacket is pulled through the doorway of a bar by an older male 'carrier' figure, or *Family* in which the man representing the 'victim' is literally pushed by a 'bar girl' out of the picture onto, we presume, a waiting bed.

Distance is further created by the interaction between visual and audio channels. Only in the ads featuring film stars Jackie Chan and Do Do Cheng (*AIDS Stuntman, Woman Protection*), do figures on the screen directly address the viewer. Those portrayed as either AIDS 'carriers' or 'victims' are never afforded such intimacy. Rarely, in fact, do we even hear what the characters say to each other, apart from muffled or distorted utterances (*Homosexuals, Family*). Rather, the figures are far removed from us, performing a kind of pantomime which is commented upon by the mouthpiece of authority embodied in the voiceover (a deep, adult male voice in all the ads). This distancing is most dramatically seen in *Sharing Needle* in which even the voiceover is momentarily dispensed with and the action is described in a series of subtitles:

1) This group is about to share a needle to inject drugs.
2) One of them is an AIDS carrier but he doesn't know it.
Neither do the others.
3) Now they will all be infected with AIDS.

Not only is a possibility (influenced by such factors as dose, frequency of exposure, and differences in host susceptibility) (National Academy of Sciences 1988) presented as a foregone conclusion ('Now they will all be infected...), but the *way* the message is presented suggests either that the figures on the screen are so 'foreign' to us that any commentary on them requires the 'translating' device of written subtitles, or that the activity they are engaged in is simply beyond the pale of spoken language. In either case, one wonders how intravenous drug users, the professed 'target audience', might react to being portrayed in this manner. The only reasonable conclusion seems to be that the ad is designed not to advise IV drug users to avoid sharing needles, but to advise 'normal' people to avoid IV drug users.

Other ads use the interaction between visual and audio channels to present conflicting information, wherein the message implied in the visual frame disclaims the content stated in the oral message. Geis (1982) has shown that contradictory visual and oral messages are typical of television advertising. The effect of this technique is often to undermine the message which is more difficult to process: if the visual message is written language, the oral message will take precedence. If the visual message consists of dramatic, easily interpreted images, it is likely to have salience over the oral message. Examples of how images undermine words can be seen in *Safer Sex*, the voiceover of which encourages condom use, but which shows a figure picking up a box of condoms, and then replacing it unopened on a nightstand, as if he has decided either to forgo condom use or forgo sexual activity altogether. A similar mixing of messages can be seen in government's very first AIDS awareness API,

Pyramid, whose oral message declares that 'AIDS is not restricted to homosexuals' and that 'it can be passed from man to woman and woman to man,' while the images presented consist of pink male icons like those found on the doors of male public lavatories multiplying exponentially to form a pink triangle which fills the screen, not so subtly reinforcing the notion that AIDS is a disease of gay men.

2.2 Selling Fear: The Generic Frame

When a television viewer is presented with a commercial, a certain set of expectations is activated based on the viewer's previous experience with television commercials in her particular culture. Viewers, for example, expect that the commercial will last for only a certain amount of time, that the intent will be to persuade, that the message will most likely have a problem-solution format with some product being represented as the solution to some problem relevant to their lives, and that the name of the product will be emphasized at the end of the commercial, usually along with some visual icon (a symbol or picture of the product itself) (Coleman 1982, Vestergaard and Schroder 1985). Furthermore, viewers from different cultures may have their own particular models through which to interpret commercials. For example, Kumatoridani (1982) points out that Japanese commercials tend to be less direct, straightforward and argumentative than American commercials. Similarly, Schidmt et al. (1990:19) in a comparison of American, Chinese, Japanese and Korean television commercials, found that American advertising is far more 'persuasive', employing stronger suggestions and more imperatives, 'while Asian advertising emphasizes other functions like informativeness... and entertainment value.' While the AIDS awareness API's of the Hong Kong government in many ways conform to viewers' expectations of the genre,

they also confound those expectations in significant ways, both on the level of universal conventions and on the level of culture specific norms of communication.

Not surprisingly, differences can be seen between the English and Cantonese versions of the government's AIDS awareness API's broadly in accordance with the observations of past researchers on differences between Eastern and Western advertising. English versions of the ads often use much more direct and personalized language; Cantonese versions take a more distanced, impersonal approach:

> Think about AIDS, it could happen to you.
>
> <insert Chinese 1>
>
> (Face up to AIDS, and take the initiative to prevent it.)
>
> (*Girls, Husband*)

Furthermore, examples can be found in which the English versions make use of strong imperatives, while the Cantonese versions structure the same information in the form of polite requests:

> Use condoms for safer sex...
>
> <insert Chinese 2>
>
> (To prevent AIDS, please use a condom...)
>
> (*Use Condom/MTR*)

The wording chosen, however is highly dependent on the contexts in which the message is presented. When the topic turns to less 'socially acceptable' behaviour such as sexual relations outside of marriage, the generalizations of Schmidt et al. are often reversed, with the Chinese translations tending to be more strongly worded. In *Safer Sex*, for example, what is expressed as a suggestion in the English version becomes a warning in the Cantonese ad, with very different advice given in the different languages:

> If you carry on with a dangerous lifestyle, at least use a condom."

<insert Chinese 3>

(If you have doubts about your partner, you'd better use a condom.)
(*Safer Sex*)

In what is probably an attempt to make the wording more culturally acceptable by not appearing to give viewers licence to participate in a 'dangerous life style', the Cantonese version of the ad actually gives a very dangerous piece of advice, as personal suspicions are not a particularly reliable test for HIV infection.

In most cases, condom use is presented as an enabling action (for safer sex) in the English commercials, whereas in the Cantonese versions it is represented rather as a preventative measure (<insert Chinese 4>) (see *Stuntman*). Similarly, sexual activity tends to be couched in more negative, judgemental terms in the Cantonese versions, as in the slogan below in which what is presented as an objective numerical equation in English becomes a moral judgement in the Cantonese version:

The more sexual partners you have, the more chance of being infected.

<insert Chinese 5>

(The more indiscriminate sexual partners, infection chances higher.)
(*Pyramid*)

Furthermore, what is continually referred to as 'promiscuity' (or 'indiscriminate sexual intercourse') in Cantonese is softened in English versions to the more euphemistic 'casual sex'.

Beyond the level of language, television commercials tend to make use of generic conventions that are similar across cultures. Among these conventions are the problem-solution format, in which the product is presented as the solution to some individual or group's problem, and 'meaning transfer' (Vestergaard & Schroder 1985), in which positive attributes of a person, place or lifestyle are transferred onto the product. Although the AIDS awareness API's of the Hong Kong government make

use of these conventions of television advertising, the way they are used is often somehow slanted or even reversed, thereby situating the ads and the characters they present outside the generic frame. For example, while most of the commercials present the problem half of the problem-solution formula (imminent or actual HIV infection) they fail to offer any solution (see *Bar, Family, Youth & Prostitution, AIDS & Travellers, Girls, Husband*). The characters are thus seen as irredeemable and disempowered, denied the chance for a happy ending usually granted to people in television commercials. When they *are* offered a way out, as is the character in *Homosexuals*, the solution is a negative one, retreat and avoidance. The possible positive solution, condom use, is hardly ever offered, and if it is, it is usually presented as an unsatisfactory second choice:

> Condoms offer some protection, but the best defense is to avoid casual sex. You never know who could be an AIDS carrier.
>
> <insert Chinese 6>
>
> (*Bar*)

By failing to complete the problem-solution structure that viewers bring to the ads as part of their expectations about what commercials should offer, the government API's reinforce a view of AIDS which sees it as totally unmanageable and sees people living with HIV/AIDS, or even those just participating in high-risk behaviour, as both helpless and hopeless. What the government is selling in the ads is not prevention, but fear.

The same kind of distortion occurs in the use of 'meaning transfer' in the ads. Vestergaard and Schroder (1985:153) define 'meaning transfer' as the process by which advertisers get viewers to associate their products with some desired image or quality by presenting the commodity juxtaposed with some object or person whose

possession of that quality is obvious to the viewer. In the AIDS awareness API's this mechanism operates in reverse. First, the quality or image transferred is usually negative rather than positive, sometimes undermining the very message the ads hope to put across. For example, despite the government's desire to promote condom use, condoms are presented in contexts which many viewers would frown upon: a cheap 'love hotel' in *Safer Sex* and a scene reminiscent of a 'category III' (adult) movie in *Use of Condoms*. When condoms are associated with positive figures, as in the ads featuring film stars Jackie Chan and Do Do Cheng, they are so far removed from the context of sexual activity that the ads' messages are obscured. Second, rather than some commodity taking on the characteristics of an individual or object, in the AIDS awareness API's individuals take on the characteristics of the 'commodity'--AIDS. Thus, by virtue of their association with a 'killer disease', AIDS 'carriers' become themselves 'killers' wilfully searching for their next 'victim'. The symbol used in the early ads to represent AIDS--a black pyramid--becomes less prominent in later spots, with the people in the ads themselves becoming symbols of disease and death. This rather abstract icon, it seems, is no longer necessary, replaced as it is by the more familiar icons of 'gay men', 'drug addicts' and 'prostitutes'.

Given its penchant for dramatization, hyperbole and problem simplification, one has to wonder how appropriate the genre of television advertising is for transmission of AIDS knowledge and awareness. In fact, seen from a purely educational point of view, what is most conspicuous about the government API's is how little information they actually contain. Lacking in detail about the actual modes of transmission, the types of sexual contact involved in transmission, the availability of HIV anti-body testing and conditions which may make testing advisable, or even the

fact that AIDS is caused by a virus, the ads give the impression that AIDS is caused by people, and that your only hope of avoiding it is to avoid *those people.* The commercials do, of course, give viewers the opportunity find out such information by calling the phone number that flashes on the screen momentarily at the end of the ads. Requiring viewers to make such an effort, however, seems a rather inefficient way to disseminate such important information. The government's most recent ads, *Salon* and *Mouth* take this technique to an almost absurd extreme, extorting viewers to find out about AIDS with the slogan, 'The More You Know, The Less the Risk', while at the same time managing to give no information whatsoever about HIV/AIDS in the ads apart from a government telephone number.

The establishment of the government as 'gatekeeper' to information about HIV transmission and AIDS is by no means particular to Hong Kong. Swanson (1993) observes the same phenomenon in the U.S. government's television campaign 'America Responds to AIDS'. By setting itself up as intermediary between the public and AIDS information, the government projects itself in the role of protector of its citizens. At the same time. however, it reinforces the notion that such information is and should be somehow restricted or 'classified'. Finally, and most tragically, it insures that people on the fringes of society will fail to get the information they need, as is illustrated in these comments from a lower-income woman in America who had just given birth to an HIV-positive child:

> I don't remember hearing anything about AIDS until either the year that I was pregnant, which would have been 1986, or the year after I had her, but I really believe it was when I was pregnant with her because I always remember saying "I'm going to write and get that information," because the only thing that was on TV was to write or call the 1-800 number to get information, and I always wanted to call and get that pamphlet, not knowing that I was going to have firsthand information. I didn't know how it was transmitted. I didn't know that it was caused by a virus. I didn't know that AIDS stood for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. I didn't know any of that. (National Public

Radio 1989)

2.3 Crime and Punishment: The Representational Frame

Perhaps the most telling aspect of television commercials is the way they reveal the ideological lens through which cultures view people and behaviour. Most advertisements, as Vestergaard and Schroder (1985:141) point out, assert and presuppose certain rules of *behavioural normalcy* which arise from and protect the dominant ideology in a society. Other critics, like Barthes (1957, 1972 trans.) see advertisements as expressions of complex systems of codes, *mythologies*, which help hold societies together. In the present analysis, the way in which commercials represent human behaviour and interaction as it is or as it 'should be' is referred to as the *representational frame*. This frame operates in Hong Kong's AIDS awareness API's in much the same way as do the physical and generic frames, drawing boundaries between the sorts of behaviour and interaction that are considered 'normal' and desirable ('in-frame'), and those that are considered 'deviant' and undesirable ('out-of-frame') and presenting individuals and groups associated with or affected by AIDS as outside the limits of what is proper and acceptable. 'The rule of behaviour that seems to be common to all situations,' says Goffman (1963:11), '...is the rule obliging participants to "fit in".' This 'fitting in' is accomplished by individuals through reference to various culturally determined maxims, among which are *rules of setting* (what is proper behaviour in particular places), *rules of status* (what is proper behaviour for individuals based on their role in society), and the *rules of exclusion* (who is permitted to participate in the discourse, and who is not). In most situations, participants who 'play by the rules' are rewarded, and those that violate them are punished in some way. Examining how these rules of behaviour and interaction are

reflected in the ads and the ways in which violators are penalized can help us to better understand the dominant ideology at work within the society in which the commercials are produced.

Examples of violation of *rules of setting* can be seen in several of the ads, perhaps the most obvious being *Bar*. The ad takes us into a typical 'straight' bar, with all the accoutrements to signal the kind of place it is: dim lighting, rock music, wine glasses hanging above the bar, and 'ladies of the evening' perched expectantly on bar stools. The camera goes on to record the interaction between a man and a woman: the woman sits down next to the man, the man looks at her with interest, she lifts the cherry from her drink, holds it before her face, smiles coyly, rubs her leg up against his, all familiar signs of growing involvement between participants in this setting. Meanwhile, however, another man sitting behind the couple spots a younger man sitting alone at a table, walks up to him, says something in his ear, and then walks out the door with him. '*You* may be the next victim,' the voiceover warns as the camera moves into a close-up of the glass door of the bar which magically transforms into the shape of a skull. The 'deviance' of the two men is highlighted in this ad not just by their sexual preference, but by their violation of the rules of setting. Not only do they 'break frame' by establishing same-sex interaction in an obviously heterosexual context, they also flout the conventions of communication associated with this place. Rather than using the standard 'subtle' signals of attraction demonstrated by the 'normal' couple, one man simply approaches the other, says a few words, and ushers him out the door. While the 'straight' couple might be equally at risk of HIV transmission, it is clearly the 'deviant' couple that is singled out for punishment.

The portrayal of *rules of status* takes on special significance for viewers in a

Chinese culture which traditionally values conformity to strictly prescribed role norms determined by one's position within the family and the society. (Yang 1993). Transgressions of such norms are seen as dangerous not just for the individual, but for the group of which he is a part. Not surprisingly, then, the AIDS awareness campaign of Hong Kong presents HIV/AIDS not just as a threat to the individual, but as a threat to familial and social harmony. Consequently, images of personal death prevalent in Western AIDS awareness campaigns (tombstones, revolvers pointed at the temple, the 'Grim Reaper') are not nearly as prominent in the Hong Kong Ads, replaced instead by images of familial dissolution and social ostracism (*Husband, Girls*). Even in *Family*, which portrays a man's funeral, the most disturbing consequence of his infection seems not to be his own death, but the fact that he can no longer fulfil his responsibilities within the family.

Another aspect of norms of status that sets the Hong Kong ads apart from Western ads is the role given to women in the campaign. Western scholars like Treicher (1988) have pointed out the virtual invisibility of women in the early medical and popular discourse on AIDS. Lupton (1994:79) observes that news coverage of AIDS in the West has tended to portray women as passive victims, 'at the mercy of male promiscuity'. Swanson (1993), in his analysis of twenty-two U.S. public service ads on AIDS, notes that in nearly half the commercials women are seen as 'victims', and in most cases they are 'portrayed in positions of powerlessness'(17). In Hong Kong, however, women command more prominent and more active status in the ads. Females are featured in thirteen of the twenty ads studied, and, in an interesting reversal of the trend noted by Swanson, it is the women in the Hong Kong ads that are usually seen as 'AIDS carriers', while the men more often take on the status of

'victims', even when they have the potential to infect others; men in these ads, it seems, are granted a kind of 'moral immunity', whereas women who violate the frame of traditional female passivity are represented as shameless seductresses. For example, the culpability of the husband who dies, presumably as the 'result' of an evening with a prostitute, in *Family* is never an issue; rather it is the woman who is portrayed as the villain. Even the wife is denied the 'victim' status accorded to her husband, despite the possibility that he may have infected her. The reason for this may be the position of privilege men retain in relation to woman in Chinese society, a situation reflected in Do Do Cheng's comments in *Woman Protection:*

> You know, we women spend a great deal of time in front of the mirror protecting our appearance...And mostly its for the man in our lives.

Another possibility may be traditional Chinese attitudes which see the woman as bearing responsibility for contraception (Kwan 1991) and, by extension, precautions against sexually transmitted diseases. This possibility is further suggested by the dialogue in *Use of Condoms:*

> Female: Have you got a condom?
> Male: Yes, I have.
> Female: Let me do it for you.

At first glance, this exchange may seem to empower the woman, but what it really does is reinforce her role as loyal handmaiden ready to take on the burden of the task for the both of them.

One of the most interesting aspects of the AIDS awareness campaign in Hong Kong is the way cultural norms are expressed in the ads through the functioning of *rules of exclusion*. As stated above, most of the ads portray individuals affected by AIDS as silent, denied to right to speak. In addition, many the ads portray them as not only being denied discourse, but as becoming the object of other people's

discourse, the topic of gossip. Examples can be seen in *AIDS & Travellers*, in which two men are heard talking about a colleague's sexual adventures while the colleague himself is pictured first on an airplane returning from what we presume to be a sex holiday, and then in a hospital bed:

> A: Have you seen Steve?
> B: No. He's not back yet. Been off somewhere chasing the girls again.
> A: Yeah, though it's all very well, I wouldn't want to be messing about with all this AIDS around.
> B: Not likely. It's just not worth it.
> A: Well, that's his problem...

and *Girls*, in which a teenaged girl calls her classmate with some news about a mutual acquaintance:

> Girlfriend: Hey, I heard some gossip today.
> Sally: What, what, what?
> Girlfriend: Do you remember meeting Raymond...at Alex's party?
> Sally: Raymond? He's cute.
> Girlfriend: Well...
> Sally: ...well, what?
> Girlfriend: I heard that he's got AIDS!

This theme of the 'AIDS carrier/victim' as the object of gossip seems particularly prevalent in the Hong Kong AIDS awareness campaign, not just in the television spots, but in print material as well. Another instance can be seen in a CEPAIDS produced AIDS education comic book called *Ah Bo's First Time*. The story opens with a man looking for his friend Ah Bo in the shop where he works. The shopkeeper tells him that Ah Bo no longer works there:

> Shopkeeper: Ah Bo...he's really done it this time.
> Friend: What's the matter with him?
> Shopkeeper: He's in the hospital. I heard he has AIDS. He's dead for sure.
> Friend: What? Ah Bo has AIDS {<insert Chinese 7>}?
> Shopkeeper: That's AIDS {<insert Chinese 8>}. But He might as well be dead. And if you're his friend, you probably have it too!
>
> (translation mine)

Rather than calling attention to the shopkeeper's intolerance, the materials seem to

treat this attitude as natural and acceptable and go on immediately to relate the story of Ah Bo's gradual corruption, beginning with an argument with his wife, moving on to his attraction to pornographic magazines, involvement with suspicious characters, use of heroin, his eventual contraction of HIV through sharing a syringe, and ending with a final scene featuring his wife kneeling by his bedside, a stark morality tale in which sex and drug use are oddly conflated and the source of all the trouble can be traced back to the breakdown of the family.

This prevalence in the Hong Kong API's of 'being talked about' presented as a consequence of 'deviance' and/or HIV infection can perhaps best be understood in the framework of Chinese cultural beliefs and methods of socialization. 'Chinese are well-known,' says Yang (1993:44) 'for their high sensitivity to others' opinions.' and they often 'define themselves (by)...others' accumulated impressions of them' (46). Good reputation results in an individual feeling he or she has *mien-zi* ('face'), while a bad reputation reflects back not just on the individual, but also on the group of which he or she is a member. Wilson (1980), in a comparative study of the socialization of Chinese school children in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and New York's Chinatown, and Caucasian and African-American children in New Jersey, found that the group from Hong Kong most overwhelmingly believed that 'the worst way to be punished' was 'in front of others' rather than alone, with Chinese children from Taiwan and the U.S. holding similar opinions, while Caucasian and African-American children were much more evenly divided in their ideas of which sort of punishment they feared most. 'Punishment by group sanction,' Wilson notes, 'is early, intensely and increasingly feared by Chinese children' (127). He goes on to remark:

> Where efforts to restore the devient individual to the group fail...
> then no recourse remains but to expel the individual from the group

> **and subject him to several varying kinds of treatment. At best he may be simply ostracized and ignored, at worst his behavior will be labeled freakish...Either of these forms of treatment involve the affected individual with withdrawl of support from the group, withdrawl of affect, and abandonment. As such, the anxieties that are raised are linked with similar anxiety patterns that were developed early in the socialization process. (Wilson 1980:132)**

It is therefore easy to see how exclusion and loss of reputation function in the Hong Kong AIDS awareness ads to deter viewers from violating social norms. The 'social death' resulting from expulsion from the group and 'loss of face' is in some ways seen as even more threatening and anxiety producing for this particular audience than is the physical death that can result from HIV infection and AIDS.

2.4 AIDS in the Classroom: The Social Frame

The outermost frame in my analysis of media messages is that which relates to how viewers apply the lessons they have learned from the ads to daily life. If such messages are successful (from the point of view of the advertisers), the frames they present will be mirrored in viewers' attitudes and interaction well beyond the scope of television viewing.

The observations in this section are based on transcripts of a class of first year English for Professional Communication students at City University of Hong Kong discussing the AIDS awareness API's as part of a unit on advertising. The students, twenty in all (16 females and 4 males) were divided into four groups of five. Each group was given a video of five of the government ads in both English and Chinese versions, asked to comment on the techniques used, rate the ads according to how effective they thought they were, and finally design an AIDS awareness API of their own. Each group was videotaped during the activity without the teacher present.

Tannen (1979), in her exploration of the way frames operate when subjects respond to a film, notes that in any speech event, many levels of framing exist

simultaneously and overlap. She writes:

> ...the speaker's expectations about being the subject of an experiment... her feelings about having her voice recorded...the speaker's expectations about films as well as her expectations about herself as a film viewer... also come into play. Finally, the events, objects and people depicted in the film trigger expectations about similar events, objects and people in the real world and their interrelationships. All these levels of knowledge structures coexist and must operate in conjunction with each other to determine how the events in the film will be perceived and then verbalized. (Tannen 1979:22)

Similarly, the activity in which these students participated in involved many overlapping structures of expectation including the frame of being a university student, the frame of being involved in a language lesson, the 'simulated' frame of the task itself (students were asked to pretend they were members of a 'focus group' asked to evaluate the ads for the government), and the many other frames of personal relationships and private experiences that may have been at work during the discussion. What I am most concerned with here is how the students approached the topic of AIDS itself, and how their framing of it within the interaction mirrored the kinds of framing we have observed in the commercials themselves. This mirroring will be looked at three levels: the level of identity, how the students situated themselves in relationship to the messages and the topic, the level of information, how students dealt with exchanging information about the topic, and on the level of attitude, how the values expressed in the ads were reflected in the students' comments about the issue and in their own API's.

On the level of identity, most of the students saw the people in the ads and those they perceived as the 'target audience' as far removed from themselves and their experience, unknowable, even beyond the reach of their imaginations.

S6: Effective^...Quite effective..yeah.
S10: Why you think that that's effective? You think that's threatening enough^
S7: Sure--

S8: You get the message immediately...very clear.
S7: I got no feeling.
S10: No, I think effective is not just only you get the message.. every time you see the commercial you will get the message.. but whether it |works.
S7: Yes--|
S10: You will be aware of AIDS..I think that's the point of effective.
S7: We're not gay, so--
S10: RIGHT--
(all Ss: laughter)
S7: So..hard to tell, right^
S10: Right..I think so.
S7: But imagine if you are..gay--
S6: Imagine we WERE gay...We would remind this commercial when we met new friends.
S7: Right...friends^
S6: BOYfriends.
S10: But do you think it's threatening enough? I doubt it..even though it uses the technique that is threatening, I don't think that's so strong.
S7: Yes.
S10: Remember some advertising from...throw the litter in our harbour.. I remember one that is VERY threatening..step on the nail^...Do you remember?
S6: Yes, I remember.
S10: I think that's very threatening...but maybe I'm not the target. I don't feel it. Do you think that's effective?
S8: It is effective when it has to remind |them^ You've| got the information.
S7: Yes.
S6: Something will be in your mind.
S7: Imagine...Imagine if you were gay..if you see the one night stand.. I think you may think of this commercial.
S6: But we have no experience, right^
S7: Imagine.
S6: We can't directly comment on this.

Even when the figures in the ads were more familiar, the students still scrupulously avoided identification with either the characters or the intended audience, as can be seen in this excerpt of a group of nineteen year old girls discussing the ad *Girls:*

S20: It describes sex is not too easy^...too easy to..have sex.
S18: Sex..but the girl is...maybe too sexual in the commercial.
S20: (inaudible)
S18: Maybe young people..especially girls..are not attracted by this commercial.
S20: I don't know why, but I think this commercial can get people's attention.
S19: Yeah.
S18: Yeah..but..they..the girls in this commercial just talk about it...

like..gossip.
S20: Yeah.
S17: Quite serious.
S18: So^..it's the worst.
S18: The worst.

The 'target audience' was in fact the very group having the discussion, yet the students failed to make any personal connection. Instead of talking about their own reactions to the ad, they disassociated themselves from it and instead speculated on how others ('young people...especially girls') might respond. Just as the ads present the issue of AIDS and those affected by it as 'out-of-frame', in discussing the topic, students were careful to keep it outside the framework of their own experience, seemingly guarding their inability to 'comment directly' on the issue as proof of their own 'immunity'.

Another kind of mirroring of the media messages in student talk can be see in the ways students coped with (or fail to coped with) giving each other information about AIDS in cases in which gaps in knowledge were perceived.

S6: It seems realistic^
S10: Uh huh..uh huh, what do you think? Unbelievable^
S8: Not UNbelievable,
S6: But only ONE time^
S10: Sorry^
S6: |Only,
S10: I don't| understand what you mean. Why not?
S6: Only once...he can be infected^
S10 & S7: WHY NOT?
(laughter)
S10: You should read some more information about AIDS.

Contrast students' reticence on this topic with the enthusiasm they exhibited when explaining to the same classmate the principle of 'montage':

S6: It's montage again^
S7: Um----
S10: No..|no--
S7: I don't| think so.
S6: Why not?
S10: You understand the concept of montage^
S6: Picture after picture.

S7: Can we talk in Cantonese?
S10: Yeah--
S7: I don't know, but the majority of the |talk,
S8: the maj|ority
should be in English.
S7: So^
S10: So try..I think we can try to explain in English.
S6: |Yeah
S7: Yes |
S10: You don't understand the concept of montage.
S7: If you get into your memory..imagine what sort of picture comes out..and then another picture... from another period in your life...you just go.. picture after picture, you see^
S10: That's not one event...but that's the whole for one event, don't you think so? That's one thing.. one |story
S7: separate| things.
S8: |Right
S10: Right|
S6: I got it now...but it is not a mini-drama this time.
S8: It's a mini-drama.
S7: Actually, the whole commercial is just picturing the process of taking drugs.

Students' failure to participate in such exuberant 'peer-teaching' when it came to their classmates' misunderstandings about AIDS may reveal not just a reluctance to talk about the subject or limitations in their own knowledge of the mechanics of transmission, but also a kind of re-playing of the government's education strategy in their own discourse--a strategy that can be summed up as: If someone needs information about AIDS, don't give it to them. Rather, encourage them to get it themselves (see especially *Salon* and *Mouth*).

Finally, and most predictably, the students' discussions reflected the attitudes and judgements either expressed or implied in the ads about the kinds of people who get AIDS, why they get it, and how they should be regarded by others in the society. This mirroring was particularly dramatic when students' attempted to design their own AIDS awareness ads. Below, one student's attempt to see the problem in the context of marriage was rejected by his classmates, and, through a combination of group

pressure and strong internal stereotypes, a man and wife were transformed within seconds into a prostitute and client.

S5: My idea is more realistic...a wife and a husband want to...
(gestures by holding his hands out in front of him, palms facing each other)
S1: Wa--
S5: And...and, ah...they want...
S1: But the question is...casual sex...we are emphasizing on...
S4: Casual...
S5: |A boy^
S1: casual| sex.
S5: A man and a woman...
S1: Unsafe sex.
S5: Just a man and a woman.
S1: And that is unsafe^..casual^
S5: First |is,
S1: What| you want to emphasize?
S5: Both.
S1: What are their relationships?
S5: Umm,
S1: Friends^
S4: Prostitutes.
S5: ... (looks from one classmate to the other)
S1: Prostitutions^
S5: Perhaps so.

When the same group had finally agreed on a script for their ad, they still had time remaining in the class period, and so enthusiastically decided to perform their commercial in front of the video camera. In their performance, the more subtle warnings and judgements expressed in the government's API's were highlighted in stark relief:

(three students sitting around a table eating chocolate biscuits)
S1: (to people waiting outside classroom) We're doing a comMERcial.
(pause as students adjust camera)
S1: Okay^...Stella--..Louisa--..do you know Willie got AIDS.
S3 & S4: (burst of laughter)
S3: AIDS^
S4: Willie got AIDS^
S1: Yeah.
S3: How do you...how does he got AIDS?
S1: I don't know..I heard it from Mimi.
S3: (laughs)

S1: You know..his girlfriend.
S4: He deSERVED it...he used to have CASual SEX...with others.
S3: He always proud he had so many sexual partners.
S1: And Mimi said he never used CONDOM--
S3 & S4: Oh--
S1: He DESERVE it--
(students resume eating chocolate biscuits)

3. Conclusion

Many teachers, on witnessing the above exchange as part of a 'role-play' or classroom discussion, might be jarred by both its content and tone, at a loss as to how to evaluate it not just for correctness but also appropriateness, and even tempted to dismiss the students as mean-spirited or insensitive. The above analysis, however, helps us to see in the event students' efforts to fit a difficult and unfamiliar topic into the most memorable and perhaps the only framework they have been given for it--local television commercials. Armed with this perspective, language teachers can go on the help students understand where their ways of seeing and talking about the subject my have come from, how other ways of approaching and talking about it might be more successful in different contexts with different people, and how important frames are in shaping our opinions and utterances in all situations. Such reflection might not only help students better deal with formulating their own personal responses to the HIV/AIDS issue, but may also help them to become better communicators, more sensitive to how cultural models operate as the basis of meaning and understanding in all interaction.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Ron Scollon for his ongoing help and support in this project, Dr. David Li, for his assistance with the English/Chinese contrastive analysis, Mr. Benny Yiu for his help with transcription of the Chinese and insights into language use in the Cantonese versions of the ads, and Ms. Fu Yuk Sze for her assistance in inputting the Chinese text.

The transcription conventions used in this paper are chiefly based on those used by Tannen (1990) (and other linguists working on "the pear project") with certain minor alterations.

...	indicates a measurable pause (more than 0.1 second)
..	indicates a slight break in timing
.	indicates sentence-final intonation
,	indicates clause final intonation ('more to come')
--	indicates lengthening of preceding phoneme or syllable
^	for words or syllables spoken with a heightened pitch (often as a phonetic signalling of a question)
?	for questions (where the grammatical structure signals an interrogative regardless of intonation)
CAPS	for syllables spoken with heightened stress or loudness
BOLD	for syllables spoken with heighten stress or loudness which are already conventionally written in capital letters (such as **AIDS**)
( )	for non-verbal utterances or behaviour such as laughter or gestures
/ /	to enclose transcriptions which are not certain
|___ |	indicates overlapping speech

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Appendix
Page 1

AIDS Awareness API's Produced by the Hong Kong Government 1987-1994

Title	Launching Date	Description	Slogan
Pyramid	01/04/87	Pink icons shaped like men form a triangle which then changes into a pyramid.	'AIDS is a pyramid of Death.'
Use Condom (MTR)	01/07/87	Man and woman walking into Mass Transit Rail station.	'Use condoms for safer sex.'
High Risk Groups	01/01/88	Word AIDS moves across screen.	'The more sex partners you have, the more chance of being infected.'
Bar (Prevention)	01/04/88	Two men meet at a 'straight' bar and leave together.	'You may be the next victim...You never know who could be an AIDS carrier.'
Youth and Prostitution	10/11/88	Portrayal of two young men going to a prostitute.	'It only takes one sexual encounter to pass AIDS on to you. Why risk it?'
Homosexuals	10/11/88	Two men meet in outdoor cafe. They begin to leave together, but one changes his mind when he sees AIDS poster on public light bus.	'It only takes one sexual encounter to pass AIDS on to you. Why risk it?'
Family (Infection of Ordinary People)	10/11/88	Portrays businessman's encounter with a prostitute interspersed with scenes of his funeral.	'It only takes one sexual encounter to pass AIDS on to you. Why risk it?'
Sharing Needle	01/12/89	Portrayal of IV drug users sharing a syringe.	'AIDS kills. Never share a needle.'
Safer Sex/Condom	01/01/90	Portrays man in cheap hotel room with companion (gender indistinguishable) in bed behind him.	'AIDS kills. Use a condom.'
AIDS & Travellers	01/12/90	Portrays man returning from a trip abroad.	'When travelling abroad you need to take extra precautions to avoid exposure to AIDS.'
Misconception I	10/11/91	People eating in a restaurant.	'You can't catch AIDS from sharing the same meal'
Misconception II	10/11/91	Industrial workers	'You can't catch AIDS from using the same equipment at work.'
Misconception III	10/11/91	Birthday party in an office.	'You can't catch AIDS by just being close to people.'

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Title	Launching Date	Description	Slogan
AIDS Stuntman	01/01/92	Movie star Jackie Chan compares sex to 'doing dangerous stunts.'	'AIDS is a killer disease. For safer sex use a condom.'
The Use of Condoms (Category III)	01/06/92	Portrayal of man and woman having sex (aired at adult movie theatres and after 2 A.M. on TV)	'For safer sex, Always use a condom.'
Woman Protection	05/12/92	Movie star Do Do Cheng compares using a condom to putting on make-up.	'Do the right thing. Always use a condom.'
Girls	01/08/93	Teenaged girl finds out that a boy she knows has AIDS.	'Think about AIDS. It could happen to you.'
Husband	01/08/93	A man who is just about to become a father finds out an old girlfriend has AIDS.	'Think about AIDS. It could happen to you.'
Salon	23/06/94	Woman who is expecting a child talks to her friends in the beauty salon about having an 'AIDS test'.	'The more you know, the less the risk.'
Mouth	23/06/94	Close-ups of mouths talking about how people don't talk about AIDS.	'The more you know the less the risk.'

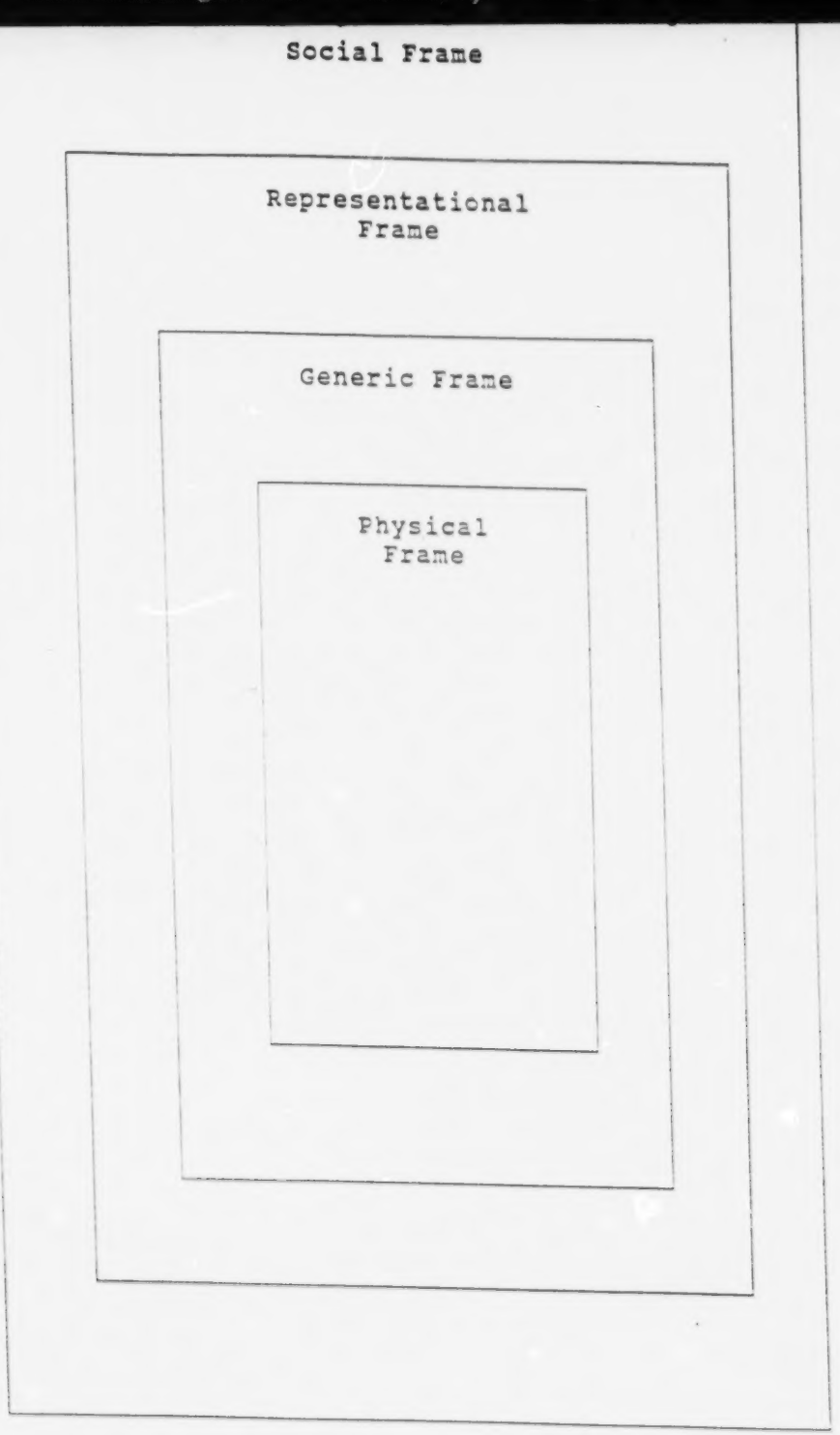
Social Frame
Representational Frame
Generic Frame
Physical Frame

Fig. 1

Chinese Text

1 正視愛滋病，應主動預防

2 預防愛滋病，請用避孕套

3 假如你對你嘅性伴侶有所懷疑就一定要用安全套

4 預防愛滋病

5 性濫交對象越多 染上機會越高

6 用避孕套雖然係安全啲，但最好嘅預防方法，都係唔好性濫交。因爲任何一個性伴侶，都可能係愛滋病帶菌者。

7 愛「死」病

8 愛滋病